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House International Relations Committee
Subcommittee on Middle East and Central Asia
Chair, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen**

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**Arab Population in the West Bank and Gaza:
The Million Person Gap**

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In 1997, the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics conducted its first census and used the results to develop population growth projections for each year from 1998 to 2015. It is these *predictions* that the PA has officially issued each year as its population size. These statistics have been routinely accepted by Israeli government agencies, the UN, the World Bank, the EU, the CIA, the US State Department, and many demographers have used the PCBS data for their own projections. However, the PCBS methodology, statistics, and assumptions have never been fully examined or evaluated.

Through in-depth analysis and comparison of the existing records, the study measured the mid-year 2004 Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank at 2.5 million instead of the 3.8 million reported by Palestinian Authority (PA) officials. In mid-year 2004 the Arab population in the West Bank was 1.41 million and 1.08 million in Gaza.

The 1997 PCBS beginning population base for *de facto* residents was inflated by:

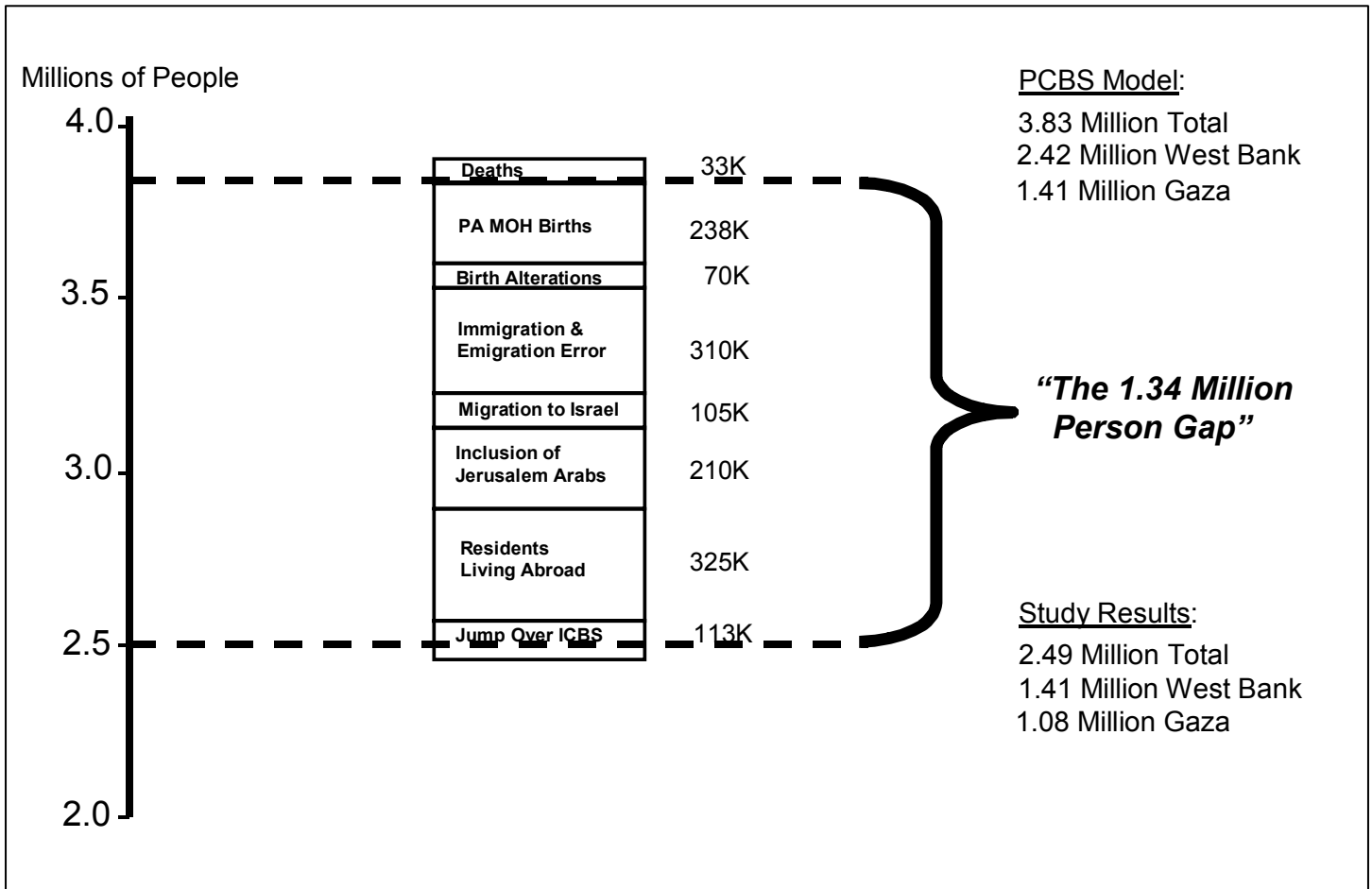
- ***Inclusion of Non-residents:*** The 1997 PCBS Census base included 325,000 Palestinian Arabs *living abroad*, even though these individuals had lived outside the Territories for many years. This group comprised 13% of the PCBS' reported population base. This fact was fully acknowledged by the head of the PCBS when the Census Results were released in 1998. Reduction: 325,000
- ***Inclusion of Jerusalem Arabs in West Bank Figures:*** Jerusalem Arabs who were already counted in Israel's population survey were also counted in the PCBS population estimate for the West Bank. Reduction: 210,000
- ***Unexplained Increase over ICBS Records:*** The 1997 PCBS census included an additional 113,000 rise above the last ICBS figures for the Territories. Yet, PA

Central Election Commission reports for adults voting in 2005 substantiated the ICBS population records from the mid-1990s. Reduction: 113,000

The PCBS Model's projections with respect to births and immigration were not met in any year between 1997 and 2004.

- ***Fewer Births:*** According to reports current through January 2005, the PA Ministry of Health recorded fewer annual births between 1997 and 2003 than the PCBS had predicted for each of those years. These lower birth figures are consistent with PA Ministry of Education figures for students entering school six years later. Reduction: 238,000
- ***Alterations of Recorded Birth Data:*** In its more recent reports, the PA Ministry of Health retroactively raised the number of births it had reported prior to the release of the 1997 PCBS census. Using data at originally reported levels lowers the number of births even further. Reduction: 70,000
- ***Net Immigration and Emigration Error:*** Instead of the large immigration originally forecast by the PCBS, the Territories experienced a steady net emigration abroad. The PCBS predicted 236,000 would move into the Territories between 1997 and 2003. Instead, 74,000 left. Reduction: 310,000
- ***Migration to Israel:*** Many residents of the Territories moved to pre-1967 Israel and Jerusalem. No adjustments were made for *unofficial* immigration as there is little data on this group. However, immigrants who legally received Israeli IDs according to Israel Ministry of Interior reports from 1997 to 2003 were removed from the PCBS count. Reduction: 105,000

Figure 1.1 shows the differences between the PCBS Model and the results of this study and the relative importance of each category in forming the gap.



Update of Demographic Statistics

The population data for West Bank and Gaza Arabs, combined with ICBS data on Israeli Jews and Arabs, provides an updated analysis of Jewish/Arab population dynamics west of the Jordan River from 1967 until the beginning of 2004:

- Over the last 38 years, the Palestinian population in the Territories has remained stable at one-quarter of the total population west of the Jordan River. While the West Bank share fell slightly, Gaza's share increased.
- Israeli-Arabs accounted for 14% of the total 2004 population, up from a 10 1/2% share in 1967.

- Jews represent 59% of the total population, having declined from a 64% majority measured in 1967. Excluding Gaza, the Jewish percentage is 67% in Israel and the West Bank.

This study led to several general conclusions about population dynamics in the region. Israeli concerns about demographic pressure from the West Bank and Gaza have evidently been exaggerated. The demographic threat to Israeli society has not quantitatively changed since 1967. All population groups experienced large-scale growth.

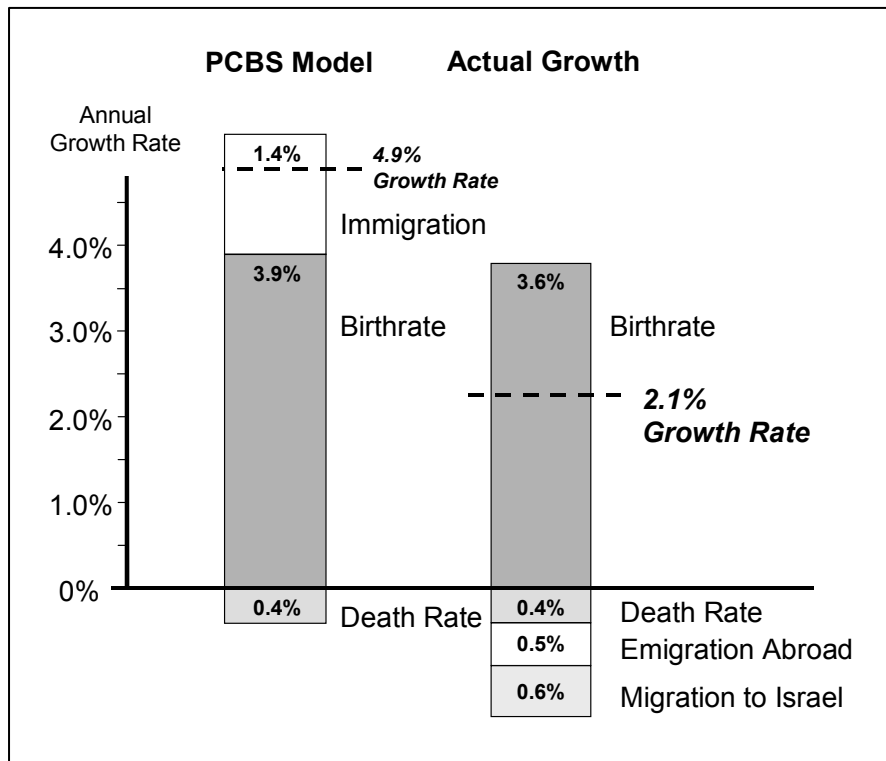
The most critical factor that reduced actual growth to levels well below PCBS expectations was migration. The PCBS' assumption of mass immigration to the West Bank and Gaza proved inaccurate, and in reality, was replaced by a total net emigration. Migration was also the determinant factor that brought their relative growth rates closer together was migration, particularly Jewish immigration into Israel. The emigration of Arabs from the West Bank and Gaza depressed the West Bank Arab and Gaza growth rates while the portion of emigrants who moved into pre-1967 Israel fueled the high Israeli-Arab growth rate. It was this emigration that reduced the overall West Bank growth rate to a level below Jewish growth rates. This migration, and not a lower natural growth, reduced the overall West Bank growth rate to a level below that of the Israeli-Jewish population.

Relative growth of different population groups west of the Jordan River is much closer than previously understood. From 1997 through the end of 2003, The Jewish population grew at an annual rate of 2.1% while the rate for the West Bank Arab population was 1.8%. For the Gaza Arab population the rate was 2.9%, while Israeli-Arabs experienced the highest annual growth at a rate of 3.3%.

The reality is that the 'green-line' has been a very porous boundary, particularly between the West Bank and Israel. Migration that occurs before the final construction of Israel's separation barrier should also be carefully evaluated, particularly in the Jerusalem area where numerous Arab residents with and without Israeli ID cards are moving to areas on the Israeli side of the fence.

The dramatic impact of migration on the overall growth rate in the Territories can best be seen graphically in **Figure 5.2**. Additionally,

Figure 5.2 Impact of Migration: PCBS Projection vs. Actual Growth in 2003 in West Bank and Gaza.



Since the results of this study were released on January 10, 2005, the PCBS has acknowledged some errors in its population model and has begun to lower both its current population estimate and its predictions about its future size. This report also addresses those recent revisions and the PCBS response to this study. The PCBS acknowledged a deceleration of assumed growth rates and lowered its population figures for 2004 by 200,000 persons and its projections through to 2015 by $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million. It's first start. Other researchers and demographers also began to reexamine and lower their own figures. Some new estimates placed the Arab population between 2.5 and 2.9 million people. Nonetheless, many pundits and government agencies continue to refer to "4 million Palestinians" living in the Territories.

Given the magnitude of the errors in the PCBS Model - its 2004 population was inflated by over 50% - demographers and state agencies would be wise to correct figures for the current population and growth rates before continuing to make any forecasts about future population size. It is important for Israelis, Palestinians and world agencies to arrive at more accurate PA population figures. The PCBS figures have driven critical decisions in Israel, are the basis for American and international foreign aid to the PA and influence infrastructure planning including water and land use. Many of these decisions and policies require reexamination in light of these lower population figures for the West Bank and Gaza.